



Newsletter No. 29 October 2012

What have we been up to?

The winter season has seen us travelling all over Australia and we have had some amazing trips and seen some amazing country, so let me give a quick summary on each.

CSR and Kimberley

Well, after 14 years of conducting our incredible 26 day Kimberley tour, this year we only received 2 bookings. As for the CSR (Canning Stock Route) we have run it since 2002 but sadly not this year with just 2 bookings also. I hate to cancel big trips as those that have registered for them have no doubt put a lot of preparation and planning into joining us on their chosen adventure. But, the reality is it takes at least 4 bookings just to cover the actual cost of a trip and no smart business can run at a loss. So regretfully I had to cancel both the Kimberley and CSR trips for 2012 – never mind though, they are both available again in 2013 and I expect there will be a rush for them.

Double Simpson trips

We may have had to cancel the Kimberley and CSR trips but we were overwhelmed with bookings for the Simpson trip and even had to put a second trip on commencing a day after the first tour. It was very interesting following the Spot trackers for each trip as each tour group literally camped in the same locations 24 hours apart despite the fact neither group knew exactly where the other was.

All went well with each trip until they reached Birdsville where for the third year in a row Mother Nature turned ugly and dumped rain over our intended route through Innamincka. Fortunately the Birdsville Track remained open and we were able to divert down this famous outback track and

spend a few days exploring the beautiful Flinders Ranges. I have to feel sorry for the owners of the White Cliffs Underground motel where we had each group booked for the last night. White Cliffs remained cut off due to wet roads for a week and needless to say we never got there.



**A familiar scene in the Simpson
Corner Country/Birdsville tour**

We had this great little trip on at the same time as the Simpson trips during the July school holidays and it was led by the likeable Wayne and Jenny. They were in Birdsville a few days before the rain hit but then as they reached Tibooburra the skies were darkening. A couple of phone calls to me in HQ and the decision was made to scamper to White Cliffs a day earlier in case the heavens opened up. Luckily they did, as the last 50 k into White Cliffs saw the rain come down and a lot of slipping and sliding, not fun with a trailer in tow (just ask Chris and Jeannette Andrews).



The Corner Country mob on Big Red

An hour after reaching the underground motel the road was closed and stayed that way for another week! During the night torrential rain fell and we were lucky there is now a sealed road heading east to Wilcannia. We called that trip the Great Escape!

Cape York

You certainly can't pick which trip will work and which one won't, previously our CY trips have been slow in filling, but not this year. In fact, we not only had one full trip but ended up offering a second CY trip a few days later which also ended up ¾'s full. I called my sister Irene and her husband Dave out of retirement for the first trip and from all accounts they had a blast. However, apart from all the fun times this trip proved to be quite a challenge with the infamous Nolans Brook taking its usual toll and immersing a few carpets and trailers in water. Dave's Cruiser also had alternator problems and from what I gather everyone pitched in to assist to keep the trip leaders mobile, thanks all.

Wayne Desmond made a welcome return to the outback touring field after his health problems of last year and led the second CY trip 6 days after the first. Wayne heard of the issues at Nolans Brook and ensured everyone got through by towing them with his trusty Troopie. Of course this is Wayne's side of the story so if anyone on the trip has another version, please let me know.



Cape York is an incredible adventure
Arnhem Land

This trip went off too! With sufficient bookings for two trips to be conducted back

to back by yours truly. This is a great way to escape Winter in the southern half of the country, I left a cold and wet Sydney in mid July and did not return until the end of September. Spending nearly two months in the top end where the minimum temp never dropped below 20 and the maximums were nudging 35 degrees!



This was the view from our camp at Cobourg

I make no secret of the effort I have put into organising trips into Arnhem Land. Three years in the planning including my own private trip up there last year meant there was a lot riding on this trip. Let me say that all this hard work and negotiation with aboriginal councils, govt authorities and anyone else who wanted a piece of the action definitely paid off.

Both trips were extremely well received by those who joined us, take a look at the comment re-printed below. As one client said, each day just got better.

Hi Vic,

The Arnhem Land tour was the best 4WD trip we have done. The cultural experience visiting the local communities in Eastern Arnhem Land was a major highlight. The visits to sacred sites, traditional fishing, weaving and cooking demonstrations certainly added to the tour. Who could forget the evening when us men were invited to join in the traditional dancing. We enjoyed the fantastic beach camp sites on the Cobourg Peninsula and East Arnhem Land. Counting the crocodile slides on the beach in the morning at the Cobourg Peninsula camp was interesting. The beach driving is good as anywhere you will find in Australia.

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The day drive along the beach of Cape Arnhem is remembered for the fantastic scenery and challenging sand driving. The sighting of numerous buffaloes and magnificent bird life in the wild added to the tour. However, it was the crocodiles that everybody came to see and there was plenty of them, big and bigger and the Jumping Crocodile tour was a highlight. As usual, the detailed planning and realistic schedules and safety measures made for a very enjoyable tour.

Stan Sheldon

Stan has completed almost every one of my personally led outback tours over the past 6 years so I really value his comments.



Just one of the many birds we saw in Arnhem Land

From my point of view, the Arnhem Land tour allowed us to have some of the best campsites I've ever experienced and to complete some incredible 4WD trips into magical locations. It's rare for me to stay in the one spot more than one night and even rarer for me to regret leaving a spot that I have, but on this trip I have to say this occurred several times. None more so than the idyllic campsite on the Cobourg Peninsular overlooking the waters of the Timor Sea. Not only was this the perfect campsite but we had it all to ourselves, guaranteed isolation!

Our experiences with the local communities were exceptional and were a real highlight for everyone. Watching the local lads spear fish in the ocean using traditional spears and woomeras plus participating in cultural

dancers and smoking ceremonies was a real buzz. Of course there was the insane fishing and the ever present crocodiles, yes, we saw a lot of big crocs and none of them were in zoos!



This is no Zoo, this was the beach we slept on at Bawaka!

The birdlife throughout the trip was outstanding and we must have seen over a hundred wild buffalo! I know this is an expensive trip, but everyone agreed it was well worth the money and provided an experience that they could not achieve themselves or with any other tour company. This is one aspect of the Arnhem Land trip that I am very proud of, some companies say they "Do Arnhem Land", but when you read the fine print they are lucky to visit it for a day or two. On my trip you spend a total of 14 days in Arnhem Land and this will be increased for next year when I add extra time at the locations that this year's customers voted as their highlights!



The fishing was amazing!

I agree it is far more expensive than my usual trips, but you may not realise that for me to conduct this tour into Arnhem Land I was required to obtain no less than 7 different licences and permits! Having said this, this is truly a unique trip that only my company is offering at a fraction of what other commercial organisations are offering. Check out the photos from this year's trip in the Gallery section of my website www.4wd.net.au



Thanks to Phil for showing me how to achieve some incredible photos

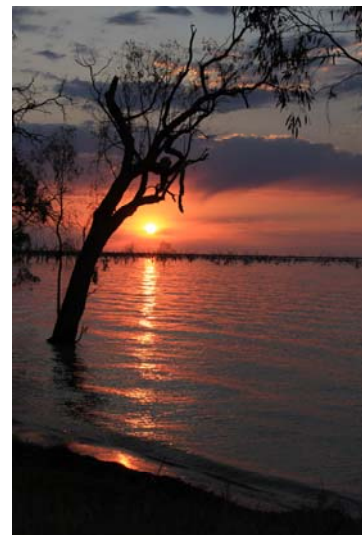


Tony and Vic after the Welcoming ceremony at one of the Homeland communities.

The good news, there is no need to miss out on this fantastic opportunity to spend a week with a pro photographer (day and night). Next year in November, we will be heading off to the incredible Victorian High Country with Phil for 7 days to once again learn all we can about taking a brilliant photo. I will be including all of the most spectacular sights such as Craig's Hut, the Pinnacles, Mt Blue Rag and Talbotville along with a day with real high country cattlemen and their horses.

Outback Photo Tour

I have just returned from this incredible week in the outback. The concept for this trip was born out of the photo courses we have conducted over the past couple of years at Braidwood. I kept saying to our pro photographer, Phil Cooper, we must go outback one day. So after our Vivid Sydney photo tour in June I decided to stop talking and take some action. The result was our just completed run down the Darling River with Phil and 4 client vehicles in tow. Having Phil for 7 days to guide us through the many functions of our cameras, set us goals to achieve, look over our shoulder and demonstrate how he does it, was priceless. I know everyone walked away with some great photos and a much better understanding of their digital camera. I've been posting a number of photos from each day of the Photo tour on the GDT facebook site, so check it out to see what you missed.



On our outback photo tour I promised a sunset over water, this was at Menindee

BUT, if you can't wait another 12 months to learn what your camera can really do, then I have a trip for you. On **17-18 November**, Phil is joining us for a weekend photo tour commencing in Nowra and visiting some great waterfalls and rock formations on the

Sth Coast with an overnight stop at my driver training facility before heading down to the beautiful cascades in Wadbilliga NP. I've got plenty of spots available on this trip so come on, make it an early Christmas present for your partner.

Shorter trips

We've had plenty of day and weekend trips since my last Newsletter in May. This included our new Barrington Tops and Myall Lakes trip, but on this one we stayed in some great accommodation in Gloucester. One of our most popular trips these days is the day trip to Turon River and it has been consistently booked out (and is again on 14 October). Of course, a perennial favourite is Stockton Beach. The beach suffered some serious damage in the June storms and for the first time in my memory the Beach was closed for several weeks. It seems the high tide and huge waves actually washed away the beach totally and the waves breached the fore dune area flooding the low areas between the big inland dunes and the beach front. The flooding and beach damage was so bad that no-one was allowed on the beach for several weeks and even now some parts of the larger dunes remain closed due to flooding and quick sand. I've seen the quick sand on Stockton previously and you definitely don't want to venture into it! I've got a trip up there on 7 October and whilst some parts are still closed we can once again offer a great day of sand driving.

One of our new trips for 2012 is our Caves to Caves tour. We ran this for the first time in late July with Wayne and Jenny leading it. This trip combines some great 4WD country with visits to both Jenolan and Wombeyan Caves plus an overnight stop in Oberon in the best motel in town. This is an absolute ripper of a weekend away for the whole family, so how come I've got no bookings for the next one in a couple of weeks on 27-28 October?

Alex once again led our Special Snow tour over the bank holiday weekend in early August. However, this time we did not have the blizzards that have made previous trips such an incredible experience. I have to say

that sadly the usual great accommodation that we use has become rather run down of late so I won't be using it again and will hopefully find somewhere better for our snow tours in the future. Does anyone out there know of a good spot close to the snow that could accommodate and feed us during the winter season?

Driver Training news

We keep providing the best 4WD training in the country at the best facility in the country (IMHO). We've won the contract with the Aust Federal Police for 4WD Training, plus Essential Energy and numerous other corporate groups and they are keeping us very busy. I recently spent a whole week at Braidwood conducting 5 x one day recovery courses for a major corporate client and was amazed how little some seasoned workers knew about the safety aspects of 4WD recovery.

A new 4WD track

In June I built a new 4WD test track at the Braidwood training centre. This is a track designed to demonstrate traction control aids, wheel placement and water fording ability. I'll be using it on my Advanced 4WD courses and Recovery courses.



Our new track shows how traction control operates

Sydney 4WD show

This is on next weekend at Eastern Creek from 12-14 October, of course we will be there, just look for the bright blue FJ Cruiser. I'm going to be on hand each

day to answer any questions you may have on our 2013 tour calendar.



You can't miss us at the Sydney 4WD show at Eastern Creek

2013 Trip Calendar

I've just compiled this and attached a copy with this newsletter, the website will be fully updated in the next few days. As you see we have a new day trip out of Sydney plus I'm leading a Flinders Ranges trip in September which should be simply amazing!



It's time I went back to the Flinders Ranges, do you want to join me next September?

First Across the Desert 2013

Well, we had such a great time in 2012 we have decided to challenge the desert yet again in March 2013 and be the First to drive across it. This is not an easy trip but it is one of the best 4WD adventures you can undertake, so if you would like to really achieve something in your

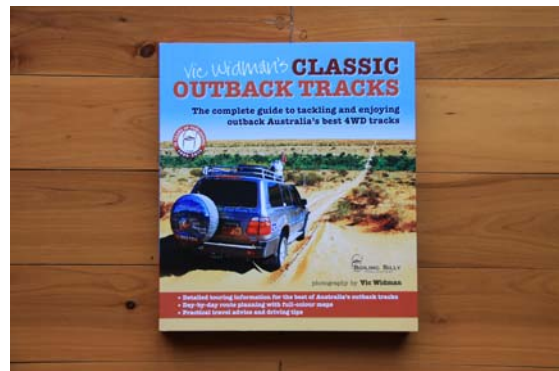
4WD, consider joining us, I have a few spots remaining.



I promise you a trip like none other

Vic's new Book – Classic Outback Tracks

It finally arrived and it has not disappointed. 19 of the best 4Wdrive adventures anyone can experience described in full detail with my great photos and detailed maps and service notes for each trip. You can purchase a signed copy from me just drop me an email at info@greatdividetours.com.au or visit our stand at the Sydney 4WD show for your own personalised copy.



New Driving lights

LED lights are becoming more popular these days and they are quite a departure from the traditional driving lights that we see in pairs hanging off the front of our bull bars. I'm currently in negotiation with Bushranger Products to have the latest in these LED lights fitted to the FJ Cruiser. Hopefully they will be in place by the Sydney 4WD show

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next weekend, so drop into my stand and have a look.

These things are not cheap either, with the 26inch bar that I'm having fitted to the roof rack on the FJ retailing in excess of \$1000.

However, government authorities might put an end to these LED lights with the Queensland Govt already issuing a directive that LED bar lights need a blackout section in the centre of them so the light appears as two lights when illuminated. It seems current Queensland regulations state that when fitting driving lights they must be fitted in pairs only!

New Camping lights

On my 4WD tours I've had a couple of Hella work lights that I fit up to the roof rack each evening to light the BBQ and immediate camp area. This year I retired them and moved to the new LED lights. But I wanted my own design to suit my needs, so I asked my mechanic, Eddy Chow from Artarmon Automotive to design a couple of LED strip lights using the flexible strips that are available with this new lighting system.



Eddy designed the Chow light for me, call him on 9439 2995 and see if he can build you one too!

The result is what I call the Chow Light, a simple LED strip fixed to a steel rod that slips into a couple of holes drilled into the roof rack, power is sourced from a long lead to a couple of power outlets under the bonnet. I used these extensively on the Arnhem Land and Outback photo trips and found they worked great throwing a nice

white light over the BBQ and the immediate camp area.

If I was going to purchase an off road trailer

It might just be a VistaRV Crossover. Don't know what that is? I believe they will be at the Sydney 4WD show so come out and have a look. I had one follow us on the Photo tour (Chris and Jeanette Andrews – who also did the Corner Country trip with it) and it was so easy to set-up and provided the perfect level of comfort and space again IMHO.



The VistaRV Crossover, possibly the best off road trailer I have seen



New faces at GDT

It was obvious that when my Nephew, Greg Widman wanted to buy a 4WD that I should help him find a good one and then train him how to use it. Of course I asked him to join the GDT team, so now finally the Widman name might be able to carry on the business when I spread my ashes across the outback!!



OK, so this is the best photo I have of Greg at present, yes it was at his wedding.

Also joining the team and bringing a vast amount of driver training and outback touring experience with him is a guy called Dave Fullerton. Dave has run Aussie Off Road 4WD training and tours for the past decade and although he is one of my direct competitors we have always shared the same passion for training and outback exploration. When Dave advised me that he was getting out of the tour business I suggested he come and work for me, getting paid for what he loves doing without the need to worry about running a business at the same time. Dave will be seen around the GDT camp from now on, welcome Dave.

Up coming trips

Looking for something to do in the next month or so? I have vacancies on our Caves to Caves tour on **27-28 October**.

In November we have a range of trips that interest you:-

10-11 Nov Brindabella Escape, a great camping weekend in the mountains behind Canberra.

17-18 Nov – Our weekend photo tour on the Sth Coast of NSW



I promise lots of great waterfalls on our next photo tour.

18 Nov – A great day trip to the Gardens of Stone in the western Blue Mtns, our Cliffs and Canyons trip.

30/12-5/1/13 – the Victorian High country. This is definitely the flavour of the month as I already have 3 trips over November and January fully booked, so I've put on another 7 day trip between Christmas and the first week of the New Year – and this one is camper trailer friendly too!

29/12-1/1/13 – Speaking of New Year, why not spend it with us on our fantastic Man From Snowy River trip.

17-23 February 2013 – I've had a few requests for a High Country trip outside of the school holidays for those that don't have Tin Lids, so I've just added this 7 day trip to our calendar.

*Advanced 4WD Course –
24-25 Nov 2012*

I have 3 spots remaining on this course, so if you want to learn what your vehicle can do and what to do when you do get stuck, give me a call on 02 9913 1395 or email me at info@greatdividetours.com.au

What's happening at Overlander?

Well I'm still writing travel articles and columns and my story on our March 2012 First Across the Desert trip is in the current issue. Coming up will be some great travel yarns on outback Sth Australia and one of my favourite 4WD tracks – the Finke river Track in Central Australia. You will also be seeing an in depth yarn on Diamantina NP which I researched just 3 weeks ago on my way back from Arnhem Land.



Just one (or two) of the outback obstacles I found in Diamantina NP

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A wet season trip?

I keep talking about flying to Darwin in January and running a wet season trip around the top end in hired 4WDs. I think the photography of the huge thunderstorms would be awesome. I've even planned a 7 day trip and decided on all the accommodation BUT, when I went to get a price on the fully equipped 4WDs, guess what? They don't hire them out during the wet season – scaredy cats if you ask me.



Britz are too scared to hire me a 4WD in the wet season, I wonder why?

If you think you would be interested in a trip like this please drop me an email at info@greatdividetours.com.au as I reckon we could hire a small coaster and still do the trip.

How about another New Zealand Tour?

I'm working on it for early April 2013, this will be to a totally new destination in the South Island just north of Christchurch. I've seen the photos of the country through which we would travel it looks amazing. Again if you are keen to join me on my next NZ trip please drop me an email and watch my website for more details.



You can't beat this for scenery, join me next April in NZ!

That's all for now and I hope this newsletter finds you fit and well.

Vic, Julie, Wayne D, Wayne B & Jenny, Alex, Brian, Dave & Irene, Richard, Greg & Helen, Ian B & Skippy/Yarn/Ian, Chris and Greg W and Dave F. How come all my staff have similar names?

All the best
Vic Widman

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OK, so this is a photo of my dog Sasha, but she is always happy to see me.